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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE INDIAN OCEAN

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 413th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 18 May 1992 at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. KALPAGE (Sri Lanka)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.30 p.m.

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 46/49 (continued)

1. Mr. BUTLER (Australia) said that the Committee had five more days in which to determine whether it could revive itself and find new energy and direction for its work after 20 years. The task would be difficult, but the deadline should be taken as a challenge.

2. Resolution 2832 (XXVI) of 16 December 1971 containing the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace, was the constitutional document for the work of the Committee, and contained principles of very great importance which did not need to be repudiated or amended. It would be avoiding the facts of history, however, if the Committee refused to see that political change over the past 20 years, and even the past two or three years, required a corresponding change in its approach. The basic mandate of 1971 had been overtaken by subsequent events and must be adapted. If the Committee failed to initiate a new approach at the current session, a significant opportunity would be lost. Some Committee members had indeed withdrawn, but none of those members or of the current members had condemned the basic idea of the Declaration. Given the central facts that time was limited, that account must be taken of change, and that no one opposed the concept of the zone of peace, the Committee must be given new life. It was no secret that his own Government had considered withdrawing, but had remained a member of the Committee to underline the sincerity of its wish for it to find new energy and direction.

3. A first step towards revitalization would be to take up the Chairman's proposal to work through the operative paragraphs of resolution 46/49 one by one, considering them from the point of view of implementation and of the underlying concept of each paragraph. The next step could be a discussion of the Declaration to determine what new mandate might be required in order to give the Committee new life and direction.

4. Paragraph 8 of resolution 46/49 referred to the roles of the permanent members of the Security Council and major maritime users. Perhaps a series of regional conferences among the various groups concerned could serve as building blocks leading up to the conference as a whole. In seeking ways to implement the Declaration, replacing the Cold War stance with such an approach would represent a fundamental change in concept.

5. Mr. GOONETILLEKE (Sri Lanka) said that his delegation had noted with concern that neither the Group of Eastern European States nor the Group of Western European and other States was currently represented on the Bureau, and hoped that those regional groups would soon nominate representatives to Bureau positions. The outcome of consultations with the permanent members of the Security Council and the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean who had left the Committee was also of concern. Those members held the view that the 1971 Declaration had been overtaken by positive developments and that great Power

(Mr. Goonetilleke, Sri Lanka)

rivalries no longer existed in the Indian Ocean. That did not exclude the possibility of future rivalries in that region, however. No delegation would subscribe to the theory that the current world order would continue indefinitely. The justification found in the 1970s for establishing a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean still existed. The States of the region should not become complacent and should equip themselves to face global change, since the Indian Ocean had always been strategically important.

6. The Chairman had said at the previous meeting that some members who had withdrawn might not be adverse to considering new approaches to achieve the goal of a zone of peace. The Committee should keep in mind, however, that it must function in accordance with the mandate given by the General Assembly. In the view of his delegation, the goal was to establish a zone of peace where the peoples of the littoral and hinterland States of the Indian Ocean could preserve their independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity and could resolve their political, social and economic problems under conditions of peace and tranquility without direct or indirect involvement in rivalries among extra-regional Powers. Proponents of new ideas should take part in the proceedings of the Committee, which would give serious consideration to any reasonable proposal.

7. Resolution 46/49 called for convening the first stage of the Conference at Colombo in 1993, or as soon as possible, but the Chairman's consultations had made it evident that it was not possible for the Conference to take place as mandated in the foreseeable future. Though the Committee had completed the major part of the organizational work for the Conference, it was apparent that it could not be held without full participation of the permanent members of the Security Council and the major maritime users. His delegation considered the Conference a tool to achieve the objective of the establishment of a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean, a cherished goal of the littoral and hinterland States for over 20 years. Sri Lanka continued to hold the view that its establishment would make a significant contribution to international peace and security, and hoped that the extra-regional Powers would respect the sentiments of those peoples.

8. Mr. JAIN (India) said that since the adoption of the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace, the world had witnessed positive and far-reaching developments. Rather than detracting from the validity of the Declaration, however, those developments served to encourage littoral States to continue working towards the objective of making the Indian Ocean a true zone of peace. The principal mechanism for making that concept a reality was a process of consultations between littoral and hinterland States of the Indian Ocean on the one hand and the great Powers, permament members of the Security Council and major maritime users on the other. Only as a result of such consultation would international agreement emerge for the maintenance of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace; therefore, full participation and cooperation of the major Powers and maritime users were essential. His

(Mr. Jain, India)

delegation shared the disappointment at the withdrawal of such participation and cooperation.

9. His delegation also shared the satisfaction at the successful completion of the preparatory work for the first stage of the Conference and looked forward to constructive cooperation with other members at the current session. It was also conscious of the concern about the prospects for the next stage in the Committee's work.

10. The Committee was not required by its mandate to include in its conclusions and recommendations a draft resolution for consideration by the General Assembly. Since it had experienced difficulty at recent sessions in achieving consensus on a draft resolution, it might be more appropriate and politically prudent to attempt such a draft resolution closer to the time of the First Committee session, which would allow any developments during the intervening period to be taken into consideration.

11. Mr. CURE (Mauritius) said that at such a critical time in the Committee's deliberations, it might be helpful to conduct informal consultations, which would permit a more open exchange of views. He was concerned about the effect on the Committee if no solution was achieved at the current session.

12. The CHAIRMAN said that the fact that the Committee was holding a formal meeting should not necessarily inhibit a constructive exchange of views. He invited comments on the suggestion by the representative of Australia that the Committee should examine the operative paragraphs of resolution 46/49 one by one.

13. Mr. JAIN (India) said that his delegation was as concerned as all others to make progress, and to that end he felt that the proposal made by Mauritius deserved more careful consideration. Informal consultations would make it possible for the delegations to engage in a freer and perhaps more productive discussion. Furthermore, the mandate of the Ad Hoc Committee was defined in only one paragraph, paragraph 12, of resolution 46/49, which directed the Committee to perform its preparatory functions for the Conference. Some paragraphs were not directly relevant to the Committee's work, and some were directed elsewhere, such as paragraph 9, which was a request to the Secretary-General. In consequence, he was not sure whether the Ad Hoc Committee was competent to start an analysis of resolution 46/49.

14. Mr. BUTLER (Australia) recalled that he had already made an informal proposal for a methodology by which the Committee could proceed. As the Chairman and the representative of India had pointed out, the Committee had a clear mandate to report to the General Assembly on the implementation of resolution 46/49. Paragraph 12 of that resolution provided an umbrella under which many things called for in other operative paragraphs could be considered. It mandated the Committee to perform its "preparatory functions" for the Conference, and those preparatory functions were largely found in

(Mr. Butler, Australia)

paragraphs 3 to 8. Paragraph 3, for example, mandated that the Conference should be held, and paragraph 5 stated that it should be structured in more than one stage. Approaching the organization of the Conference in that way might well relate to the proposal he had made earlier of working with subregional building blocks. If the Committee were to discuss such an approach, it would in fact be discussing the implementation of paragraph 5. Such a discussion was likely to lead, in turn, to a more conceptual discussion of the issues facing the Committee, as he had also proposed earlier in the meeting.

15. He felt that the suggestion of the representative of Mauritius, to hold informal consultations, was a useful one.

16. Mr. SHA Zukang (China) said his delegation supported the suggestion of the representative of Mauritius, and also agreed with the views expressed by the representative of Australia. Many things could be subsumed under the notion of the preparatory work for the Conference. First, there was the issue of the status of the Ad Hoc Committee. As had already been said, the preparatory work for the Conference had already been completed once and he sought clarification on the relationship of the work that it was proposed to undertake in the current meetings to that completed the previous year. Another issue was that of participation. Paragraph 8 of resolution 46/49 described the participation in the Conference of the permanent members of the Security Council and of the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean as "essential", but the question was what the Ad Hoc Committee was to do if either of those two groups decided not to participate. A third issue was whether the 1971 Declaration was still relevant and valid. He agreed with the representative of Australia that it was a very important historical document, and that there was no question of amending or repudiating it, but the world situation had changed. The Committee had to consider the implications of that change, but they also had to recall, as the representative of Sri Lanka had pointed out, that the situation might well change once again. A fourth issue was that of the continued existence of the Ad Hoc Committee itself. He agreed with the representative of Australia that the Committee was at a crucial juncture, and that there was a need to resuscitate it, as it had an essential role to play in the establishment of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. He hoped that the Committee could address those four issues squarely, openly, and without concealing matters in diplomatic language.

17. Mr. HASSAN (Sudan) said that to follow the suggestion of the representative of Australia and analyse resolution 46/49 paragraph by paragraph from the implementation and conceptual points of view might result in conclusions which would call into question the standing of the resolution adopted by the General Assembly. The Committee's mandate was to press ahead with the preparations for the Conference, as stated in paragraph 12. He wished that the representative of Australia had given more explanation of why he felt such an analysis was necessary. He shared the view of the representative of Sri Lanka that even if many of the tensions which had been

(Mr. Hassan, Sudan)

behind the 1971 Declaration were no longer present, there was no guarantee that the situation would not change back again, and supported the proposal of the representative of Mauritius that the Committee should undertake informal consultations.

18. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the meeting be suspended so that informal consultations could take place.

19. It was so decided.

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.